Assume the Worst

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Assume the Worst

by barcharonte

Summary

Will suspects that one of Abigail's friends poses a threat to her, and he is ready to eliminate it. Hannibal has useful friends, and Beau is still very sweet on Abigail. In the background, Freddie Lounds cries.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

True to her word back in New Orleans, Abigail did not introduce Will and Hannibal to her friends.

This, however, did not mean they did not get to meet those friends. Dropping by her flat unannounced was a nifty thing like that.

Seeing as this was Abigail's prep year, most of her friends from her class were from different countries. So far, they had met Hassan, a willowy boy from Egypt; Anika, a subdued but genial girl from Montenegro, and Can, an impish boy with a lot of tattoos from Turkey. They were scholarship kids, smart and talented, and Abigail's conversations with them were an amusing mix of broken French and English. But as far as Will was concerned, they were getting along just fine.

And then Abigail had friends who spoke English. Christina was a freshman from the UK and liked takeaway Chinese food. Daniel was her elder brother who studied civil engineering in another university here but came to share the aforementioned food on a regular basis. And then there was the American girl they met tonight, Lily.

Lily was a *liability*.

When they arrived at France, Hannibal made contact with some of his less respectable acquaintances from his time in Europe. It took little time and a hefty sum to arrange permanent residence permits for all three of them. In the eyes of the authorities, Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter, and Aubrey Parker were perfectly entitled to their lives in France.

Aubrey "Abby" Parker, who left a perfectly fine pair of parents back in the States to study art in Paris, who lost her ear and gained a scar on her neck in an unfortunate car accident when she was fifteen, and who was not, in any way, Abigail Hobbs, the daughter of and possible assistant to a famous cannibalistic serial killer who preyed on teen girls.

That last bit was evading Lily. The girl took one look at Will and Hannibal at Abigail's door, inconspicuous as can be, and her eyes widened. She slowly turned to look at Abigail, then back at them, and then she fucking *smirked*.

"I should have killed Freddie Lounds," Will said, fuming from his place on the passenger seat of the Bentley Hannibal had arranged to be brought here. "Hell, *you* should have killed her! But oh, no," Will snorted. "You liked the attention she was giving you, didn't you? All those articles, those *comment sections*."

At Will's bitter, accusatory tone, Hannibal briefly looked away from the road to regard him. Will was restless, his white-knuckled fists on his lap, jaw tight and eyes blazing as he stared straight ahead. The righteous fury that emanated from him was entrancing.

"We will visit Beau during the mid-term break," Hannibal said, eyes back on the road. "Which is a month from now. I'm sure we can pay Miss Lounds a visit as well."

“It’d be suspicious for her to die when we are there,” Will said sullenly, fighting the urge to throw caution to the wind and start planning her murder in detail. “And she’s doing such a good job on the whole Chilton-is-the-Ripper thing, too. She is useful,” he sneered the last part, lips lifting to reveal his teeth.

“Then let us not mourn the fact that neither of us killed her, my love,” Hannibal said, steering the wheel with minimal movements in the last turn home. “And focus on whether or not this girl-”

“*Lily*.”

“Yes, Lily, and whether she really recognized Abigail.”

“You saw it too, Hannibal,” Will hang his head down, and at the sight of his hands clenched into fists, he made a conscious attempt to relax. “She looked at us like she recognized us. She looked at Abigail. Our pictures, hers, yours, mine, they are all over *TattleCrime*. You and I are not suspected of any crimes but Abigail… *Lily* must have read those fucking articles, and now that she saw us together, she pieced the pieces together.” With a sigh he rubbed his face vigorously. “Oh god, she knows. She’ll bully Abigail. Blackmail her. And then we’ll have to kill a kid.”

“She’s in college, Will. She’s legally an adult.”

“Not. The. Point.”

Hannibal pulled into their driveway and parked. The moment the car stopped, Will got out and slammed the door behind himself, stomping into the house and slamming the front door as well. Hannibal looked after him, expressionless, and assessed the situation.

On the one hand, Lily had not said anything implying she knew who Abigail was. Abigail had forgotten her textbook with Will and Hannibal, and couldn’t retrieve it because she was entertaining her friends at her place. They had used the excuse to drop off the book to check on these friends. This Lily had opened the door, and her sly smiles at them could very easily be interpreted as rude, yes, but did not necessarily indicate that she realized “Abby” was Abigail Hobbs.

On the other hand, if Will was right and that was what happened, then Abigail was in danger. Not explicit or immediate danger, but danger nonetheless. Will was correct to assume the worst of Lily, because even though they did not know her personally, they knew human nature and how far from virtuous it could get. Abigail could be put in a situation she could not handle, and made to do things she did not want to do. Anything from social exclusion to giving up on her education was possible, and that simply would not do.

There was also the matter of her close proximity to Hannibal and Will. While they did not make it a point to broadcast their locations and living arrangements, it was not a secret. So far, the only person from the States with full disclosure was Beau. Jack Crawford knew Hannibal was in Europe, and unless he checked Will’s records recently, he also thought Will was still somewhere in the country. If it came down to it, they would tell Jack that they were living together in Paris. Hannibal did not think Jack would have an easy time wrapping his

mind around that, but everything looked legal on paper and, what, did Jack have homophobic biases? No, no they didn't think so. Problem solved.

Abigail, on the other hand, could muddy the waters. While she had not been told she could not leave the country, Jack had been suspicious of her involvement in the Shrike murders anyway. And if he learned that she had left the country, under a false name no less, he would not rest until he got to the bottom of it. *And* if he learned that she was living with his favourite profiler and his esteemed psychiatrist friend, then the suspicion would spread over to them.

It had the potential to cause needless stress for them, and lead to a massive bloodshed. And while Hannibal was alright with the latter, he was not so keen to see his family ill at ease.

Luckily, this was a problem they could solve.

He found Will in the study by their new desk, his beautiful face and focused eyes illuminated by the light of the laptop screen.

"Found her," Will said without looking up. "Very easily, too. She's in her second year in acting, volunteers in an animal shelter, and is the fucking head of the local rowing team." He turned the screen towards Hannibal when he approached. There she was, arm in arm with her teammates, a gold metal hanging from each of their necks and big smiles on their faces. Underneath the picture were short passages advertising the athletes' accomplishments, with hers at the top. "Lily Margaret Thomas. They meet for training three times a week at the same facility."

"We'll start there, and find out the rest of her routine. I'll take the odd days," Hannibal offered.

"And I'll take the rest," Will nodded. They did stakeouts before, and had it down to a science by now.

"I still insist that we make sure she poses a threat to Abigail before we do anything drastic. They are friends. If she disappears suddenly, Abigail might come under suspicion."

"I know," Will sighed. "Let's just find out where she lives, in any case."

Hannibal gripped Will's shoulders over the thick material of his coat- neither had taken off their clothes in their haste to assess the risk- and squeezed in a bid to release some of the tension there. "You noticed in time. We will be ready, Will."

Will nodded, and gradually relaxed. "Let's have an early night," he said. "I need to get up before dawn tomorrow. Those kids take their rowing very seriously."

"An admirable endeavour," Hannibal replied. "Excellence in sports, as in all things, require discipline and vigilance. We should encourage Abigail to hone her athletic skills as well."

Will finally looked at up at him, and Hannibal was delighted to see that his bait lured in a smirk. "Don't you think her athletic skills are honed enough already?"

The memory of her silently pursuing one of their latest prey through the woods and trampling him down without even breaking a sweat played in both their minds. Hannibal had been so proud of her that day. “Perhaps they are,” he conceded. “Let’s go to bed then. I will read to you.”

“Oh no you won’t,” Will huffed, shrugging off Hannibal’s hands as he got up. “I mean it, Hannibal, I need to be up with the lark.”

“And my rendition of Beccaria’s *Dei delitti e delle pene* should put you right to sleep,” Hannibal said, face a perfect mask of innocence.

“Nice try,” Will said with a huff, shedding the jacket and draping it over the armchair as he made his way out of the room. “I *know* you know what that does to me.”

And Hannibal was in fact wonderfully aware of how much his voice in general- and for some reason, speaking old Italian in particular- turned Will on.

“You can’t blame me for trying,” he called after Will, and chuckled to himself when the reply “I can!” was yelled at him from upstairs. With one last look at Lily’s smug face, he slid the laptop’s lid shut. He then collected Will’s jacket, hung it along with his own in the foyer and made sure the doors were locked, before he followed Will to their bedroom.

*

In one week, they learned a lot about Lily. Where she lived, where she practiced with her team mates, which cafe she preferred for coffee and which patisserie for an indulgence in a single croissant, which lectures she took, when and where. She kept an organized life with clear-cut routines, but what was most startling was the company she kept.

Abigail. It was Abigail.

Whenever Lily’s schedule was congruent with Abigail’s, they met. Both Will and Hannibal, on their respective excursions, saw the two meet and had brief moments of what could, if pressed, be called panic as they dove for cover so Abigail did not detect them. The girls met for coffee four times during the week, and once they met at a theatre after class. Will was adamant that this was a part of Lily’s schemes, whatever they were, while Hannibal was less and less sure with each meeting he witnessed, the two young women laughing and overall looking as though they were having the time of their lives.

“It’s a cover,” Will said as he set the table on the evening of the eighth day of their reconnaissance mission.

Hannibal did not remind Will of having seen Abigail and Lily walking arm in arm along the Seine this afternoon so as not to be contrary, but he did say, “We should ask Abigail during dinner this evening.”

Will grunted noncommittally in response. This was another matter that made Hannibal want to proceed with caution. Abigail had attended dinner with them the entire week, with the exception of one night when she called to let them know that “she and a friend had to study

for a quiz tomorrow." Lily was a sophomore in *acting*, and unless Abigail meant one of her friends from her own class, it meant she was lying. Her demeanour at the dinners were jovial and relaxed, snapping pictures of them whenever she could manage to catch them unawares, and overall indicative of neither being bullied nor blackmailed. Knowing her penchant for deception, Will did not find solace in the appearance of normalcy, and was reluctant to outright ask her before he was in full possession of all he could learn about the situation, for fear of spooking her and setting off a chain of events that may have irreversible consequences.

Will and Hannibal were at odds over what exactly was going on, and the uncertainty was doing no favours to help them maintain a carefree conduct during the day. Will could often be found on the laptop or the tablet, gathering everything he could that was in any way related to Lily, and Hannibal was stuck between thinking up a recipe for especially lean meat and stopping himself from calling Abigail and demanding answers *right now young lady*.

Which was why, during one of Abigail's convivial recounting of her day's events that evening, Hannibal snapped.

"And then Madame Babin said-"

"What is going on between you and Miss Thomas?" he interrupted before he could stop himself. He must have surprised others as well as himself because the question was met with a stunned silence and two pairs of wide, blue eyes lifting up to regard him.

"W-what do you mean?" Abigail asked eventually, her voice higher than usual. Will shook off his surprise and turned to her.

"We know, Abigail," he said, a severe expression on his face.

Abigail's eyes kept going from Hannibal to Will, a frown marring her delicate features. "You-know?"

"Yes," Hannibal replied curtly, reaching for Will's hand and holding it on the table top. "And we'd like an explanation. Now, Abigail."

"Wow," Abigail slowly put down her fork and knife, but her mouth was twisted with resentment as she leaned back. "I would have expected this from my parents, but you guys? I can't believe it."

Will, holding his breath until that point, released it in confusion, his eyes darting to gauge Hannibal's reaction before looking at her again. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that I'd get it from my homophobic parents from a small Minnesota town, but you two are men! In a relationship! I cannot believe you are looking at me like this now!"

The penny dropped simultaneously for both Will and Hannibal.

"You and Lily are..." Will started, "Together?" Hannibal finished.

"...Yes?" Abigail said. "Wait, I'm so confused. You said you knew?"

Will breathed a sigh of relief and sagged forwards, the hand not holding Hannibal's supporting his head. "Oh thank fuck," he breathed. Hannibal was shaking his head now, looking at Will with as repressed a smile as he could.

"I told you things may not be so bad," he couldn't help but poke a bit.

"Okay, will someone explain what's going on?" Abigail asked, defiant. Her upper hand lasted about half a second.

Will straightened up fast. "First, you will explain why your friend looked at us funny and kept smirking at us while we were there," he said. Concern shifted to relief, and that to anger so fast that Hannibal foresaw the headache that would surely visit Will later in the evening.

"What does that have to do with anything?" Abigail exclaimed but relented when she received the full brunt of Will's glare. "Fine. She recognized you, alright? I showed some of your pictures to her. She thinks you guys are adorable. She wanted to meet you, but I wanted to know we were a sure thing before I introduced her to you." Some of her bravado faded, and she added more quietly, "She was happy when you two dropped by."

"For fuck's sake, Abigail," Will murmured, and drained his glass of red with his eyes closed. Hannibal regarded Abigail then.

"We thought Miss Thomas recognized you, and was using your past against you," Hannibal explained. He decided to present a united front with Will, and refrained from mentioning that it was Will who had been wholly convinced of this scenario. He received a squeeze at his hand for it, indicating Will's grudging gratitude.

Abigail rolled her eyes. "Well you should have asked then, shouldn't you? What with you being so big on open communication and all that."

"We thought you felt you couldn't come to us," Will said, but it was a weak defence. He knew that maybe, just maybe, he might have let his mind run away with him on this. Still, all things considered, he didn't blame himself for it. "You should have told us, Abigail."

"I agree," Hannibal said. "You know that you being discovered here with us could have undesirable repercussions. Had she recognized you as we thought, we would have had to take certain precautions."

"I know," Abigail said, duly chastised, before her eyes widened comically. "Wait. Were you planning to kill and eat my girlfriend?"

"It seems we will get to have her for dinner, after all," Hannibal said, withdrawing his hand from Will's grip and reaching for his own glass of wine. "Just not in the way we predicted."

"Yes, what the hell, invite her over," Will nodded, and then started to laugh. "Oh god, she's such a nice kid too!"

"I always thought so," Hannibal said as he leaned towards Abigail as though he was sharing a secret. Will kicked him under the table, his laughter decreasing in volume but not stopping.

Abigail looked from Will to Hannibal, and finally smiled.

“She’s really amazing,” Abigail breathed, relaxing now that the confusion was gone and mood was light. She reached for her phone, swiping through pictures of Lily and giving bits of information regarding each: Lily with Abigail, with her tubby cat, in training, on the stage, rowing, cooking, knitting… and laying under a thin sheet with a seductive smile aimed up at the camera.

“Not that!” Abigail removed her phone from their sight the moment that picture made an appearance. “Oh god, sorry,” she said, blushing furiously. Will hid a smile under his hand whereas Hannibal was unabashed in his enjoyment of Abigail’s embarrassment.

“You *did* invade our privacy on a regular basis,” he reminded, waving his fork towards her in emphasis.

“Karma is a bitch,” Will murmured, and they shared a laugh. Abigail said something under her breath about them being *the worst*, but was ignored.

“Find a way to let her know that her downstairs neighbour has a key to her mailbox,” Will remembered to say when they moved onto dessert. “She checks it several times a day and locks it up again afterwards.”

“What? What a creep,” Abigail said, but then looked at them with a fond exasperation. “I can’t believe you guys trailed her for a week.”

“In our defence,” Hannibal said, “You had not shown any romantic inclinations until now. It was easy to overlook the possibility.”

“I never knew anyone like her until now.” Will lifted an eyebrow at the besotted quality of her voice. “I wish I can start the classes soon so I can learn to draw her like she deserves to be drawn,” Abigail continued, oblivious. “I can never get her eyes right. The expression is so intricate and elusive; it doesn’t translate well on paper. And let’s not mention the *colours*.”

Hannibal gave her a knowing smile, one that relayed that it was a grievance with which he was deeply acquainted. “I would try oil painting on canvas. I recently found that it works wonders to capture the exact shades one wants. If you can get her to pose for you, that is,” Hannibal added, the jab entirely for Will.

“One of you was more than enough,” Will told him, long suffering. “Now there’s two of you.”

“Hey, I’m not like Hannibal!” Abigail protested.

“I was not the one waxing poetic about the way her she ‘shone like a star on the stage,’ or the way her hair ‘billowed in the morning wind’ now, was I?” Will retorted. He was surprised he had not disconnected his eyes with how much he’d been rolling them in the last hour. “Better start writing poems and composing sonatas for her and, voila! You are officially Hannibal Lecter.”

“You compose for him?” Abigail asked Hannibal, impressed.

“I find no lack of inspiration in this house,” Hannibal said, accepting her respect with a graceful tilt to his head. “I would also suggest waltzing. You might have a better chance convincing her than I have.”

“It’s not that I don’t want to, it’s that I can’t,” Will declared with a conviction that came from having said this exact thing for dozens of times now. “I have no sense for rhythm.”

“I know for a fact that that’s not true,” Hannibal also relayed his choice words, sending him a meaningful look.

“We tried it once, don’t you remember? It didn’t exactly work out,” Will nudged him with his foot. He had finally relented and let Hannibal try to teach him the steps. They had managed to distract each other with idle flirtation, though, and ended up just slow dancing. It was the night Abigail had managed to film them and send the clip to Beau, and they hadn’t tried their hands at waltzing since. It had been partly because of the shame now associated with the memory, at least for Will.

“We couldn’t apply ourselves to it then. Let’s try it once again. If it really proves to be the abominable experience you seem to think it would be, I shall not mention it again.”

“You know what, fine, you asked for it,” Will said. He loved that Hannibal could call his bullshit so well, but the insistency was tiring. “Okay. You will be the one to nurse our twisted ankles at the end of your pretentious waltz.”

“Gladly,” Hannibal purred like the overgrown cat that he actually was. He got his cream and looked just about ready to find himself a patch of sunlight and nap. Will, as was his due tonight, rolled his eyes.

“I think that’s my cue. Better get home now” Abigail said, placing her spoon into the now-empty dessert bowl. “Don’t trouble yourselves, I know my way out,” she said when both Will and Hannibal made to get up. She collected her bag and gave them a wave over her shoulder as she walked towards the door, but paused just before she got out. “Uh, um, guys? Thank you. You know, for… Uh. The food. The food was delicious,” she mumbled, and carried on. After the front door closed behind her, Hannibal turned to Will with a smirk.

“She expresses her love like me, but her gratitude like you, *mylimasis*,” he teased.

“You’re right,” Will could admit that without trouble. He left the dishes for Hannibal to collect and went to the liquor cabinet. “But I hope she doesn’t drink away her stress like I will now.” After a quick look, he selected a bottle of *rakee* whose brand was written in a script Will could not decipher. Where Hannibal found these was still a mystery to him. “I plan to get shitfaced.”

“Hopefully not before we waltz,” Hannibal mused, his voice carrying from the kitchen. “I can treat a twisted ankle, but I’d rather not increase the chances of it happening.”

“I’ll go slow,” Will promised, but poured a healthy dose into his glass. Hannibal’s serving was decidedly less. “Could you bring the water from the fridge?”

“Already one step ahead of you,” Hannibal appeared beside him with the jug of cold water, and placed it on a coaster he also brought from the kitchen. He huffed when he saw the distribution of the spirit. “You were not kidding, were you, love?”

“Nope,” Will said, and did not let the water and *rakee* get well acquainted before he gulped down half his glass. The taste was mellow and the scent of anise was pleasant, but it was a mean drink that hit hard. “That feels good,” he said, savouring with closed eyes the buzz he could already feel.

Holding his own glass with one hand and scrolling down the waltz list on his phone with the other, Hannibal hummed. It had taken some convincing to get him used to the Bluetooth speakers instead of the gramophone and plaques he preferred for their superior sound quality, but he did see the convenience now. Selecting a piece, he took Will’s half drained glass from him, put them both down on the cabinet, and led Will to the open space before the windows. Just as he was about to get Will into the starting position, intent on explaining why he chose this particular piece and relaying trivia on the composer, Will shrugged him off and reached for his phone in his pocket.

“Oh, I have to tell dad,” he said, waltz immediately forgotten as he began to type, so excited that he had to delete and start over many words. Hannibal watched him fondly as Will told him what he was writing as he wrote them. “Abby… is in *love*… Has... girlfriend… Wants to… draw her… and waltz… Tease her… mercilessly… for me… please…” He hit send. “There.” Putting his phone back in his pocket, he looked up at Hannibal and found himself face to face with his besotted lover. “What?” He asked, feeling suddenly self-conscious.

“Nothing,” Hannibal said, and simply wrapped both arms around Will’s waist. Will, likewise, wrapped his own around Hannibal’s neck, and asked again when Hannibal rubbed their noses together.

“What?”

“I just want to hold you, nothing more,” Hannibal said, swaying them not to the rhythm of the music, but to a rhythm of their own.

“I may not know how to dance, but I know this is not waltz,” Will said.

“No it’s not,” Hannibal nodded, and rested their foreheads together. His breath warmed Will’s lips when he spoke. “But it is much more appropriate for the moment, I think. We can always try again later.”

Will tilted his head so their lips could meet in a soft kiss. It went on and on as they swayed, but managed somehow to stay chaste. The piece ended, but they kept going, swinging and swaying slowly. Their hearts were beating against each other, and the simple fact of being close and sharing warmth was just as intoxicating as any spirit they could drink. Will kissed him again.

“You suck at this,” he murmured, rubbing their cheeks together. “If you keep giving up before you start, I’ll never learn the dance.”

“We will have many more opportunities, my love, if I can do anything about it.”

Hey!

Will reached for his phone without leaving Hannibal’s arms, and read the message he received over his shoulder. “*I know. She just called to tell me. I won’t tease, she’s precious. Don’t kill her lady friend.*” Will sighed just as Hannibal laughed out loud, and threw his phone on the nearby couch. “She couldn’t let me have this one time, could she? She had to tell him before I could. Just once, I wanted to be the terrorist spy in this family.”

“If you want, you can tell your father a secret about me. Tell him that I’m in love, too,” Hannibal said, lifting a head to cradle Will’s skull as he rested his head on Hannibal’s shoulders. “Madly, irrevocably, impossibly in love.”

“But he knows that already,” Will said, torn between pouting at his missing chance and melting at the declaration. He chose the latter, and snuggled deeper into the embrace. “But can I tell him you buy scentless soap and shampoo because, and I quote, you like my natural scent?”

“You can,” Hannibal said, “but before you do, just imagine telling Beau that for a moment.”

“Oh, no,” Will said with a slight shudder. “That won’t do. But I’ll find something embarrassing, just you wait and see.”

“I am looking forward to it.” Hannibal then released Will and went to retrieve their drinks. “Here’s to not having to kill Abigail’s lady friend,” he teased, and raised his glass. Will grudgingly clicked his against it.

“I’ll drink to that,” he mumbled and took a sip, but his previous good mood was fading now. “It could still happen, you know. Someone someday can still recognize her.”

“Can they,” Hannibal sipped at his drink and judged the taste before deciding, quite arbitrarily, that it needed ice.

“Hannibal,” came Will’s suspicious voice from behind, and footsteps followed him into the kitchen. “Hannibal what did you do?”

“Me?” Hannibal asked, raising one hand to his chest in indignation as he used the other to retrieve ice from the freezer. “Oh, ye of little faith. What could I possibly have done?”

“With you, sky is the limit, so who knows,” Will said. “What is it this time?”

“I have given our dear friend Lionel some money,” Hannibal admitted without further ado. Lionel- a pseudonym, surely- was a man with an extensive network of acquaintances who excelled at using their talents to carry out quite the dishonest and corrupt activities. He knew the man ever since Florence, and had utilized his services even all the way from Baltimore on occasion. Their residence permits and Abigail’s entire new identity was his doing, and he was

good at what he did. Hannibal had received the update about their most recent business venture earlier in the afternoon and been wanting to share it with Will since. It was truly a wonder he managed to sit on it this long. Still, he tried to appear nonchalant as he explained. “And he used some of it to find someone to do a little something for our dear Miss Lounds.”

He finally looked up at Will, who was staring at him blankly in strained silence. Luckily, Hannibal knew him enough to know what he was thinking. “Nothing as drastic as that, I assure you. She is alive and breathing, at least to my knowledge,” he hastened to correct. “In the grand scheme of things, perhaps what happened to her was nothing but a minor setback. An inconvenience,” Hannibal said, articulating each syllable of the word as if he was savouring it.

An impatient whine made it past Will’s lips. “Just out with it already!” he said, bracing himself by squaring his shoulders and taking a deep breath.

“You ask so nicely, too,” Hannibal teased, but complied as he added ice to Will’s drink as well. “Unfortunately, Miss Lounds was hacked recently. All her accounts, including the *TattleCrime* and her online data storage, were wiped. Any external storage, I was told, were going to be similarly corrupted upon being connected to her computer.” Will was staring at him as he took in everything. “It is not an exact solution, and she may still hold copies that she could try and put back online, but it is a considerable setback. In any case, it is untraceable back to us. Lionel is always very thorough.”

“And she’s made so many enemies by now that we would not even come to mind,” Will said, considering the words and marvelling at how things did not prove to be as bad as he had expected. The rest of his drink was gulped down without his express awareness, and the glass was put back down on the island, the remaining ice clattering inside. Will slowly shook his head. “I love you so much,” he said, sincerity and awe in his voice.

“And I love you, *mylimasis*,” Hannibal smiled. It was an incredible thing to see Will so savage in his desire to keep his loved ones safe, and a pleasure to be able to support him with whatever means he had available. “So much that I give the honour of making the shovel talk to you. It is a family craft for you at this point, and I dare not assume I could do it better. I am confident that you will make sure Miss Thomas knows not to upset Abigail.”

“Oh I will,” Will nodded, his attention easily misdirected due to the mixture and percentage of alcohol in his system. “I’ll rip her billowing hair right off her scalp if she even thinks about it.”

“Yes,” Hannibal grinned, eyes bright, “Please say it just like that, and keep the growl at the end.”

“Are you making fun of me, Hannibal?” Will stepped around the counter and leaned in, revelling in the scent of anise on Hannibal’s breath.

“On the contrary, my love. I simply adore you.”

“Good, keep at it,” Will said. “You deserve a reinforcement for your expenditure, too. I suppose you may come upstairs and read that pretentious book to me now.”

“Oh, *may* I?” Hannibal stole a kiss before Will could speak. “If I may, then I shall.”

“You take the glasses and the ice,” Will nodded towards the island, “and I’ll bring the bottle and the water. Might as well make a night out of it. But make no mistake, love,” he leaned in to whisper into Hannibal’s ear. “I will make you keep reading well after you begin to slur.”

“Do you promise?” Hannibal murmured into Will’s neck.

“I promise,” Will replied, his voice low and rumbling in his chest.

Needless to say, it was money well spent and thoroughly, enthusiastically reimbursed to the best of Will’s abilities. In the morning, when Hannibal was relatively free of hormones and alcohol, but sated with pleasure humming within his muscles, he took his tablet and went to check the *TattleCrime* home page again. All that greeted him was a mini clip of a man telling off a woman holding a mic to his face. “You are not even a real journalism,” the man huskily said on a loop as the clip repeated itself.

Hannibal imagined Miss Lounds’ frustrated tears as she tried to fix this, and the image proved to be so satisfactory that he made a mental note to invite Lionel over for dinner to thank him. After all, a job well done deserved gratitude. But first, he had a menu to put together for when he and Will would officially meet Abigail’s first ever girlfriend. With a smile, he got down to work.

End Notes

Edit: “You are not even a real journalism.” Google it :)

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